

From the original. July 21. 1785
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FATAL CURIOSITY:

A TRUE
TRAGEDY.

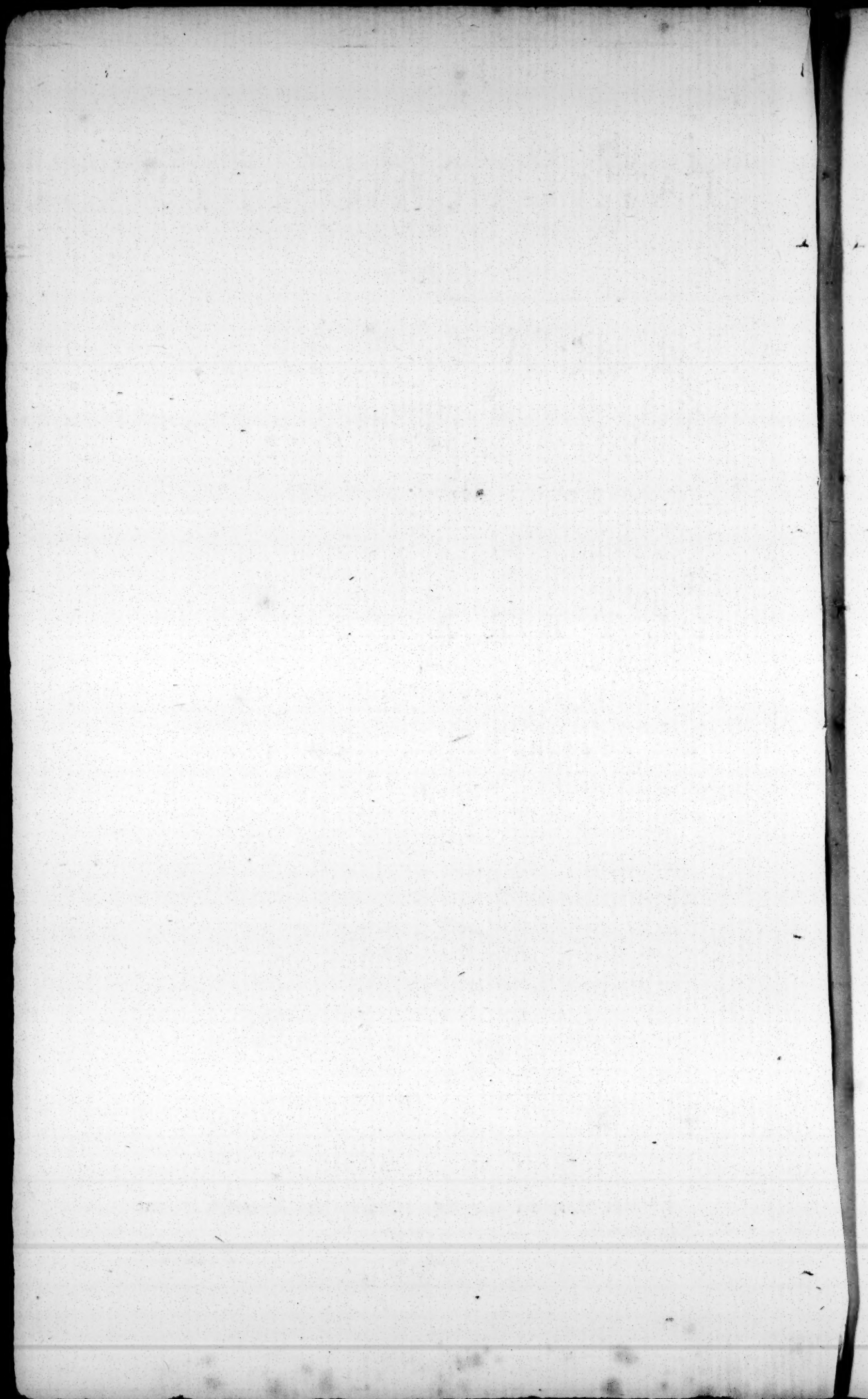
Written by GEORGE LILLO,
1736.

WITH
ALTERATIONS,

As revived at
The THEATRE-ROYAL, HAY-MARKET,
1782.



L O N D O N :
Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand,
M.DCC.LXXXIII.
[Price One Shilling.]



P R O L O G U E,

Written by *Henry Fielding*,
1736.

Spoken by *Mr. Roberts*.

THE tragic Muse has long forgot to please
With Shakespear's Nature, or with Fletcher's
Ease:

No Passion mov'd, thro' five long Acts you sit,
Charm'd with the Poet's Language, or his Wit.
Fine Things are said, no matter whence they fall;
Each single Character might speak them all.

But from this modern fashionable Way,
To-night, our Author begs your Leave to stray.
No fustian Hero rages here to-night;
No Armies fall, to fix a Tyrant's Right:
From lower Life we draw our Scene's Distress:
— Let not your Equals move your Pity less!
Virtue distress in humble State support;
Nor think, she never lives without the Court.

Tho' to our Scenes no Royal Robes belong,
And tho' our little Stage as yet be young*,
Throw both your Scorn and Prejudice aside,
Let us with Favour, not Contempt, be try'd;
Thro' the first Acts a kind Attention lend,
The growing Scene shall force you to attend;
Shall catch the Eyes of every tender Fair,
And make them charm their Lovers with a Tear.
The Lover too by Pity shall impart
His tender Passion to his fair One's Heart:
The Breast which others Anguish cannot move,
Was ne'er the Seat of Friendship, or of Love.

* This Tragedy was first acted at the Theatre in the Hay-Market.

P R O L O G U E,

Written by George Colman,
1782.

Spoken by Mr. Palmer.

*L*ONG since, beneath this humble Roof, this Play,
Wrought by true English Genius, saw the Day;
Forth from this humble Roof it scarce has stray'd,
In prouder Theatres 'twas never play'd.

There you have gap'd and doz'd o'er many a Piece
Patch'd up from France, or stol'n from Rome or
Greece,

Or made of Shreds from Shakespear's Golden
Fleece.

There Scholars, simple Nature cast aside,
Have trick'd their Heroes out in Classic Pride;
No Scenes where genuine Passion runs to waste,
But all bedg'd in by Shrubs of modern Taste:
Each Tragedy laid out, like Garden Grounds;
One circling Gravel marks its narrow Bounds.
Lillo's Plantations were of Forest Growth,
Shakespear's the same; great Nature's Hand in both!
Give me a Tale the Passions to controul,
Whose lightest Word may harrow up the Soul!
A magic Potion, of charm'd Drugs commixt,
Where Pleasure courts, and Horror comes betwixt.

Such are the Scenes, that we this Night renew;
Scenes, that your Fathers were well pleas'd to view;

*Once we half paus'd, and while cold Fears prevail,
 Strive with faint Strokes to soften down the Tale;
 But soon, attir'd in all its native Woes,
 The Shade of LILLO to our Fancy rose.
 Check thy weak Hand, (it said, or seem'd to say)
 Nor of its manly Vigour rob my Play!
 From British Annals I the Story drew,
 And British Hearts shall feel, and BEAR it too.
 Pity shall move their Souls, in spite of Rules;
 And Terror takes no Lesson from the Schools.
 Speak to their Bosoms! to their Feelings trust!
 You'll find their Sentence generous and just.*

PERSONS.

P E R S O N S.

	1736.	1782.
OLD WILMOT, -	Mr. <i>Roberts</i> ,	<i>Bensley</i> .
YOUNG WILMOT,	Mr. <i>Davies</i> ,	<i>Palmer</i> .
EUSTACE, - -	Mr. <i>Woodburn</i> ,	<i>R. Palmer</i> .
RANDAL, - -	Mr. <i>Blakes</i> ,	<i>J. Bannister</i> .
AGNES, - -	Mrs. <i>Charke</i> ,	<i>Miss Sherry</i> .
CHARLOT, - -	Miss <i>Jones</i> ,	<i>Mrs. Bulkley</i> .
MARIA, - -	Miss <i>Karver</i> ,	<i>Miss Hooke</i> .

SCENE, *Penryn, in Cornwall.*

FATAL CURIOSITY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Wilmot's House.

Old Wilmot alone.

THE day is far advanc'd. The chearful sun
Pursues with vigour his repeated course:
No labour lessens, nor no time decays
His strength, or splendor: evermore the same,
From age to age his influence sustains
Dependent worlds, bestows both life and motion
On the dull mass that forms their dusky orbs,
Cheers them with heat, and gilds them with his
brightness.

Yet man, of jarring elements compos'd,
Who passes from change to change, from the
first hour

Of his frail being to his dissolution,
Enjoys the sad prerogative above him,
To think, and to be wretched!—What is life
To him that's born to die!——

Or, what the wisdom, whose perfection ends,
In knowing, we know nothing!——

Mere contradiction all! A tragic farce,
Tedious tho' short, elab'rate without art,
Ridiculously sad——

Enter

8 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Enter Randal.

Where hast been, Randal?

Rand. Not out of *Penryn*, fir; but to the strand,
To hear what news from *Falmouth* since the storm
Of wind last night.

O. Wilm. It was a dreadful one.

Rand. Some found it so. A noble ship from
India
Ent'ring the harbour, run upon a rock,
And there was lost.

O. Wilm. What 'came of those on board her?

Rand. Some few are sav'd, but much the greater part,
'Tis thought, are perish'd.

O. Wilm. They are past the fear
Of future tempests, or a wreck on shore:
Those who escap'd, are still expos'd to both.
Where's your mistress?

Rand. I saw her pass the *High-street* t'wards the
Minster.

O. Wilm. She's gone to visit *Charlot*. She
doth well.

In the soft bosom of that gentle maid
There dwells more goodness, than the rigid race
Of moral pedants e'er believ'd, or taught.
With what amazing constancy and truth,
Doth she sustain the absence of our son,
Whom more than life she loves! How shun
for him,
Whom we shall ne'er see more, the rich and
great;
Who own her charms, and sigh to make her
happy!

Since

Since our misfortunes we have found no friend,
 None who regarded our distress, but her ;
 And she, by what I have observed of late,
 Is wearied, or exhausted. Curst condition!—
 To live a burden to one only friend,
 And blast her youth with our contagious woe!—
 Who that had reason, soul, or sense would bear it
 A moment longer? Then this honest wretch!—
 I must dismiss him—Why should I detain
 A grateful, gen'rous youth to perish with me?
 His service may procure him bread elsewhere,
 Tho' I have none to give him.—Prithee, *Randal*!
 How long hast thou been with me?

Rand. Fifteen years.

I was a very child when first you took me,
 To wait upon your son, my dear young master.
 I oft have wish'd I'd gone to *India* with him,
 Tho' you, desponding, give him o'er for lost.—
 [Old Wilmot *wipes his eyes*,
 I am to blame: this talk revives your sorrow
 For his long absence.

O. Wilm. That cannot be revived
 Which never died:

Rand. The whole of my intent
 Was to confess your bounty, that supplied
 The loss of both my parents: I was long
 The object of your charitable care.

O. Wilm. No more of that: Thou'st served me
 longer since
 Without reward; so that account is balanced,
 Or rather I'm thy debtor. I remember,
 When poverty began to show her face
 Within these walls, and all my other servants,
 Like pamper'd vermin from a falling house,
 Retreated with the plunder they had gain'd,
 And left me, too indulgent and remiss

10 FATAL CURIOSITY.

For such ungrateful wretches, to be crush'd
Beneath the ruin they had help'd to make,
That you, more good than wise, refus'd to leave
me.

Rand. Nay, I beseech you, sir!—

O. Wilm. With my distress,
In perfect contradiction to the world,
Thy love, respect, and diligence, increas'd.
Now all the recompence within my power,
Is to discharge thee, *Randal*, from my hard,
Unprofitable service.

Rand. Heaven forbid!
Shall I forsake you in your worst necessity?—
Believe me, sir! my honest soul abhors
The barb'rous thought.

O. Wilm. What! canst thou feed on air?
I have not left wherewith to purchase food
For one meal more.

Rand. Rather than leave you thus,
I'll beg my bread, and live on others bounty
While I serve you.

O. Wilm. Down, down my swelling heart,
Or burst in silence! 'Tis thy cruel fate
Insults thee by his kindness—He is innocent
Of all the pain it gives thee—Go thy ways:
I will no more suppress thy youthful hopes
Of rising in the world.

Rand. 'Tis true, I'm young,
And never try'd my fortune, or my genius,
Which may perhaps find out some happy means,
As yet unthought of, to supply your wants.

O. Wilm. Thou tortur'st me: I hate all obli-
gations
Which I can ne'er return—And who art thou,
That I shou'd stoop to take 'em from thy hand!

Care

Care for thyself, but take no thought for me;
I will not want thee—trouble me no more.

Rand. Be not offended, sir! and I will go.
I ne'er repin'd at your commands before;
But, Heaven's my witness! I obey you now
With strong reluctance, and a heavy heart.
Farewel, my worthy master! [Going.

O. Wilm. Farewel—Stay!
As thou art yet a stranger to the world,
Of which alas! I've had too much experience,
I shou'd, methinks, before we part, bestow
A little counsel on thee—Dry thy eyes:
If thou weep'st thus, I shall proceed no farther.
Dost thou aspire to greatness, or to wealth?—
Quit books and the unprofitable search
Of wisdom there, and study human kind:
No science will avail thee without that;
But that obtain'd, thou need'st not any other.
This will instruct thee to conceal thy views,
And wear the face of probity and honour,
'Till thou hast gain'd thy end: which must be
ever

Thy own advantage, at that man's expence
Who shall be weak enough to think thee honest.

Rand. You mock me, sure!

O. Wilm. I never was more serious.

Rand. Why should you counsel what you
scorn'd to practise?

O. Wilm. Because that foolish scorn has been
my ruin.

I've been an idiot, but would have thee wiser,
And treat mankind, as they would treat thee,

Randal,

As they deserve, and I've been treated by them:
Thou'st seen by me, and those who now despise
me,

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How men of fortune fall, and beggars rise;
Shun my example; treasure up my precepts;
The world's before thee: be a knave, and prosper.
What art thou dumb? [*After a long pause.*]

Rand. Amazement ties my tongue.
Where are your former principles?

O. Wilm. No matter;
Suppose I have renounced 'em: I have passions,
And love thee still; therefore would have thee
think,

The world is all a scene of deep deceit,
And he who deals with mankind on the square,
Is his own bubble, and undoes himself.
Farewel and mark my counsel, boy. [*Exit.*]

Rand. Amazement!
Is this the man, I thought so wise and just?
What teach and counsel me to be a villain!
Sure grief has made him frantic, or some fiend
Assum'd his shape: I shall suspect my senses.
High-minded he was ever, and improvident,
But pitiful and generous to a fault.
Pleasure he lov'd, but honour was his idol.
O fatal change! O horrid transformation!
So a majestic temple sunk to ruin,
Becomes the loathsome shelter and abode
Of lurking serpents, toads, and beasts of prey;
And scaly dragons hiss, and lions roar,
Where wisdom taught, and music charm'd be-
fore. [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.

Charlot's House.

Enter Charlot and Maria.

Char. What terror and amazement must they
feel
Who die by ship-wreck!

Mar. 'Tis a dreadful thought!

Char. Ay! is it not, *Maria*?—To descend,
Living and conscious, to the wat'ry tomb!—
Alas! had we no sorrows of our own,
The frequent instances of others woe,
Must give a gen'rous mind a world of pain.
But you forget you promised me to sing.
Tho' chearfulness and I have long been strangers,
Harmonious sounds are still delightful to me.
There's sure no passion in the human soul,
But finds its food in music. I wou'd hear
The song compos'd by that unhappy maid,
Whose faithful lover 'scap'd a thousand perils
From rocks, and sands, and the devouring deep;
And after all, being arriv'd at home,
Passing a narrow brook, was drowned there,
And perished in her sight.

S O N G.

Mar. Cease, cease, heart-easing tears;
Adieu, you flatt'ring fears,
Which seven long tedious years
Taught me to bear.

Tears are for lighter woes;
Fear no such danger knows,
As fate remorseless shows,
Endless despair!

Dear cause of all my pain,
On the wide stormy main
Thou wast preserv'd in vain,
Tho' still ador'd:

Had'st thou died there unseen,
My wounded eyes had been
Saved from the direst scene
Maid e'er deplor'd.

[*Charlot finds a letter.*
Char.

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Char. What's this?—A letter superscribed to me!

None could convey it here but you, *Maria*.
 Ungen'rous, cruel maid! to use me thus!
 To join with flatt'ring men to break my peace,
 And persecute me to the last retreat!

Mar. Why should it break your peace, to hear
 the sighs
 Of honourable love? This letter is ——

Char. No matter whence: return it back un-
 open'd:

I have no love, no charms but for my *Wilmot*,
 Nor would have any.

Mar. Alas! *Wilmot's* dead,
 Or living, dead to you.

Char. I'll not despair: Patience shall cherish
 hope;
 Nor wrong his honour by unjust suspicion.
 I know his truth, and will preserve my own.
 Whether he sleeps secure from mortal cares,
 In the deep bosom of the boist'rous main,
 Or, tost with tempests, still endures its rage;
 No second choice shall violate my vows;
 High Heaven, which heard them and abhors the
 perjurd,
 Can witness, they were made without reserve:
 Never to be retracted, ne'er dissolv'd
 By accident or absence, time or death.

Mar. And did your vows oblige you to sup-
 port
 His haughty parents, to your utter ruin?—
 Well may you weep to think on what you've done.

Char. I weep to think that I can do no more
 For their support. What will become of 'em!—
 The hoary, helpless, miserable pair!

Mar.

FATAL CURIOSITY. 15

Mar. What I can't praise, you force me to
admire,
And mourn for you, as you lament for them.
Your patience, constancy, and resignation
Merit a better fate.

Char. So pride would tell me,
And vain self-love, but I believe them not:
And if by wanting pleasure I have gain'd
Humility, I'm richer for my loss.

Mar. You have the heavenly art still to im-
prove
Your mind by all events—But here comes one,
Whose pride seems to increase with her misfor-
tunes.

Her faded dress; unfashionably fine,
As ill conceals her poverty, as that
Strain'd complaisance her haughty, swelling heart.
Tho' perishing with want, so far from asking,
She ne'er receives a favour uncompell'd,
And while she ruins, scorns to be oblig'd:
Let me depart, I know she loves me not. [*Ex, Mar.*]

Enter Agnes.

Char. This visit's kind.

Agn. Few else would think it so:
Those who would once have thought themselves
much honour'd
By the least favour, tho' 'twere but a look,
I could have shewn them, now refuse to see me.
'Tis Misery enough to be reduc'd
To the low level of the common herd,
Who born to beggary, envy all above them;
But 'tis the curse of curses, to endure
The insolent contempt of those we scorn.

Char. By scorning we provoke them to con-
tempt,

And

16 FATAL CURIOSITY.

And thus offend, and suffer in our turns :
We must have patience.

Agn. No, I scorn them yet;
But there's no end of suff'ring : Who can say
Their sorrows are complete? My wretched
husband,

Tired with our woes; and hopeless of relief,
Grows sick of life.

And, urg'd by indignation and despair,
Would plunge into eternity at once,
By foul self-murder.

Char. Gracious Heav'n support him !

Agn. His fix'd love for me,
Whom he would fain persuade to share his fate,
And take the same, uncertain, dreadful course;
Alone withholds his hand.

Char. And may it ever !

Agn. I've known with him the two extremes of
life,

The highest happiness, and deepest woe,
With all the sharp and bitter aggravations
Of such a vast transition — Such a fall

In the decline of life ! — I have as quick,

As exquisite a sense of pain as he,

And would do any thing, but die, to end it;

But there my courage fails. Death is the worst
That fate can bring, and cuts off ev'ry hope.

Char. We must not chuse, but strive to bear
our lot

Without reproach, or guilt. By one rash act
Of desperation, we may overthrow

The merit we've been raising all our days,

And lose our whole reward. And now, me-
thinks,

Now more than ever, we have cause to fear,

And be upon our guard. The hand of Heaven
Spreads

FATAL CURIOSITY. 17

Spreads clouds on clouds o'er our benighted
heads,

And, wrapt in darkness, doubles our distress.
I had, the night last past, repeated twice,
A strange and awful dream: I would not yield
To fearful superstition, nor despise
The admonition of a friendly power
That wish'd my good.

Agn. I've certain plagues enough,
Without the help of dreams, to make me
wretched.

Char. I wou'd not stake my happiness or duty
On their uncertain credit, nor on ought
But reason, and the known decrees of Heaven.
Yet dreams have sometimes shewn events to come,
And may excite to vigilance and care.
My vision may be such, and sent to warn us,
(Now we are tried by multiply'd afflictions)
To mark each motion of our swelling hearts,
Lest we attempt to extricate ourselves,
And seek deliv'rance by forbidden ways —
To keep our hopes and innocence entire,
'Till we're dismiss'd to join the happy dead.

Agn. Well, to your dream.

Char. Methought, I sat, in a dark winter's
night,
On the wide summit of a barren mountain;
The sharp bleak winds pierc'd thro' my shiv'ring
frame,
And storms of hail, and fleet, and driving rains
Beat with impetuous fury on my head,
Drench'd my chill'd limbs, and pour'd a deluge
round me.

On one hand, ever-gentle Patience sat,
On whose calm bosom I reclin'd my head;
And on the other, silent Contemplation.

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At length, to my unclos'd and watchful eyes,
That long had roll'd in darkness, dawn appear'd ;
And I beheld a man, an utter stranger,
But of a graceful and exalted mien,
Who press'd with eager transport to embrace me.
I shunn'd his arms. But at some words he spoke,
Which I have now forgot, I turn'd again ;
But he was gone. And oh ! transporting sight !
Your son, my dearest *Wilmot* ! fill'd his place.

Agn. If I regarded dreams, I should expect
Some fair event from yours.

Char. But what's to come,
Tho' more obscure, is terrible indeed.
Methought we parted soon, and when I sought
him,

You and his father— Yes, you both were there—
Strove to conceal him from me. I pursu'd you
Both with my cries, and call'd on heaven and
earth

To judge my wrongs, and force you to reveal
Where you had hid my love, my life, my
Wilmot!—

Agn. Unless you mean t'offend me, spare the
rest.

'Tis just as likely *Wilmot* should return,
As we become your foes.

Char. Far be such thought
From *Charlot*'s breast : But when I heard you
name

Self-murder, it reviv'd the frightful image
Of such a dreadful scene !——

Agn. You will persist !——

Char. Excuse me : I have done. Being a dream,
I thought, at least, it could not give offence.

Agn. You cou'd not think so, had you thought
at all.

But

But I take nothing ill from thee. Adieu ;
I've tarried longer than I first intended,
And my poor husband mourns the while alone.

[*Exit Agnes.*]

Char. She's gone abruptly, and I fear displeas'd.
The least appearance of advice or caution,
Sets her impatient temper in a flame.
When grief, that well might humble, swells our
pride,
And pride increasing aggravates our grief,
The tempest must prevail 'till we are lost.
Heaven grant a fairer issue to her sorrows! [*Exit.*]

SCENE III.

The Town and Port of Penryn.

Enter Young Wilmot and Eustace in Indian Habits.

Y. Wilm. Welcome, my friend, to *Penryn*!
Here we're safe.

Eust. Then we're deliver'd twice: first from
the sea,
And then from men, who, more remorseless, prey
On shipwreck'd wretches, and who spoil and
murder

Those whom fell tempests and devouring waves,
In all their fury, spar'd.

Y. Wilm. It is a scandal,
(Tho' malice must acquit the better sort),
The rude unpolish'd people here in *Cornwall*
Have long lain under, and with too much justice:
For 'tis an evil grown almost invet'rate,
And asks a bold and skilful hand to cure.

Eust. Your treasure's safe, I hope.

Y. Wilm. 'Tis here, thank Heaven!

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That long had roll'd in darkness, dawn appear'd ;
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Char. Excuse me : I have done. Being a dream,
I thought, at least, it could not give offence.

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at all.

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FATAL CURIOSITY. 19

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I've tarried longer than I first intended,
And my poor husband mourns the while alone.

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The least appearance of advice or caution,
Sets her impatient temper in a flame.
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And pride increasing aggravates our grief,
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Being in jewels, when I saw our danger,
I hid it in my bosom.

Eust. I observed you,
And wonder how you could command your
thoughts,
In such a time of terror and confusion.

Y. Wilm. My thoughts were then at home. O
England! England!

Thou seat of plenty, liberty, and health,
With transport I behold thy verdant fields,
Thy lofty mountains rich with useful ore,
Thy num'rous herds, thy flocks, and winding
streams.

After a long and tedious absence, *Eustace!*
With what delight we breathe our native air,
And tread the genial soil that bore us first!
'Tis said, the world is ev'ry wise man's country;
Yet after having view'd its various nations,
I'm weak enough still to prefer my own,
To all I've seen beside—You smile, my friend!
And think, perhaps, 'tis instinct more than reason.
Why be it so: Instinct preceded reason
Ev'n in the wisest men, and may sometimes
Be much the better guide. But be it either,
I must confess, that even death itself
Appear'd to me with twice its native horrors,
When apprehended in a foreign land.
Death is, no doubt, in ev'ry place the same;
Yet nature casts a look towards home, and most
Who have it in their power, chuse to expire
Where they first drew their breath.

Eust. Believe me, *Wilmot!*
Your grave reflections were not what I smil'd at:
I own the truth. That we're return'd to *England*
Affords me all the pleasure you can feel.

Yet I must think a warmer passion moves you :
Thinking of that I smil'd.

Y. Wilm. O *Eustace!* *Eustace!*

Thou know'st, for I've confest to thee, I love;
But having never seen the charming maid,
Thou can'st not know the fierceness of my flame.
My hopes and fears, like the tempestuous seas
That we have past, now mount me to the skies,
Now hurl me down from that stupendous height,
And drive me to the center. Did you know
How much depends on this important hour,
You wou'd not be surpriz'd to see me thus.
The sinking fortune of our ancient house,
Compell'd me young to leave my native country,
My weeping parents, and my lovely *Charlot*,
Who rul'd, and must for ever rule my fate.
—O! shou'd my *Charlot!* doubtful of my truth,
Or in despair ever to see me more,
Have given herself to some more happy lover! —
Distraction's in the thought! — Or shou'd my
parents,

Griev'd for my absence, and oppress'd with want,
Have sunk beneath their burden and expir'd,
While I too late was flying to relieve them;
The end of all my long and weary travels,
The hope that made success itself a blessing,
Being defeated and for ever lost;
What were the riches of the world to me?

Eust. The wretch who fears all that is possible,
Must suffer more than he, who feels the worst
A man can feel, yet lives exempt from fear.
A woman may be false, and friends are mortal;
And yet your aged parents may be living,
And your fair mistress constant.

Y. Wilm. True, they may;
I doubt, but I despair not. No, my friend!

My

My hopes are strong and lively as my fears ;
 They tell me, *Charlot* is as true as fair ;
 That we shall meet never to part again ;
 That I shall see my parents, kiss the tears
 From their pale hollow cheeks, cheer their sad
 hearts,

And drive that gaping phantom, meagre want,
 For ever from their board ; their days to come
 Crown all with peace, with pleasure, and abundance ;

Receive their fond embraces and their blessings,
 And be a blessing to 'em.

Eust. 'Tis our weakness :

Blind to events we reason in the dark,
 And fondly apprehend what none e'er found,
 Or ever shall, pleasure and pain unmixed ;
 And flatter and torment ourselves by turns,
 With what shall never be.

Y. Wilm. I'll go this instant
 To seek my *Charlot*, and explore my fate.

Eust. What in that foreign habit !

Y. Wilm. That's a trifle,
 Not worth my thoughts.

Eust. The hardships you've endur'd,
 And your long stay beneath the burning zone,
 Where one eternal sultry summer reigns,
 Have marr'd the native hue of your complexion :
 Methinks you look more like a sun-burnt *Indian*,
 Than a *Briton*.

Y. Wilm. Well, 'tis no matter, *Eustace* !
 I hope my mind's not altered for the worse,
 And for my outside—But inform me, friend !
 When I may hope to see you.

Eust. When you please :
 You'll find me at the inn.

Y. Wilm.

FATAL CURIOSITY. 23

Y. Wilm. When I have learn'd my doom,
expect me there.

'Till then, farewell!

Eust. Farewel! Success attend you!

[*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT II. SCENE I.

Charlot's House.

*Enter Charlot thoughtful; and soon after a
Servant from the other side.*

Serv. Madam, a stranger in a foreign habit
desires to see you.

Char. In a foreign habit!—

'Tis strange, and unexpected. But admit him.

[*Exit Servant.*]

Who can this stranger be! I know no fo-
reigner—

Enter Young Wilmot.

Nor any man like this.

Y. Wilm. Ten thousand joys!

[*Going to embrace her.*]

Char. Sir, you are too bold—Forbear, and
let me know

What business brought you here, or leave the
place.

Y. Wilm. Perfidious maid! Am I forgot, or
scorn'd?

Char. Can I forget a man I never knew!

Y. Wilm. My fears are true; some other has
her heart:

She's

24 FATAL CURIOSITY.

She's lost: My fatal absence has undone me.

[*Aside.*

O! cou'd thy *Wilmot* have forgot thee, *Charlot*!

Char. Ha! *Wilmot*! say! what do your words import?

O gentle stranger! ease my swelling heart;
What dost thou know of *Wilmot*?

Y. Wilm. This I know:

When all the winds of heaven seem'd to conspire
Against the stormy main, and dreadful peals
Of rattling thunder deafen'd ev'ry ear,
And drown'd th' affrighten'd mariners loud cries;
When livid lightning spread its sulphurous flames
Thro' all the dark horizon, and disclos'd
The raging seas incens'd to his destruction;
When the good ship in which he was embark'd,
Broke, and o'erwhelm'd by the impetuous surge,
Sunk to the oozy bottom of the deep,
And left him struggling with the warring waves;
In that dread moment, in the jaws of death,
When his strength fail'd, and ev'ry hope forsook
him,

And his last breath press'd towards his trem-
bling lips,
The neighbouring rocks, that echo'd to his
moan,

Return'd no sound articulate but—*Charlot.*

Char. The fatal tempest, whose description
strikes

The hearer with astonishment, is ceas'd;
And *Wilmot* is at rest. The fiercer storm
Of swelling passions that o'erwhelms the soul,
And rages worse than the mad foaming seas
In which he perish'd, ne'er shall vex him more.

Y. Wilm. Thou seem'st to think he's dead;
enjoy that thought;

Perfuate

Persuade yourself that what you wish is true,
 And triumph in your falshood. Yes, he's dead,
 You were his fate. The cruel winds and waves,
 That cast him pale and breathless on the shore,
 Spared him for greater woes—to know, his *Charlot*,
 Forgetting all her vows to him and heaven,
 Had cast him from her thoughts—Then, then he
 died;

But never can have rest. Ev'n now he wanders,
 A sad, repining, discontented ghost,
 The unsubstantial shadow of himself,
 And pours his plaintive groans in thy deaf ears,
 And stalks, unseen, before thee.

Char. 'Tis enough:

Detested falshood now has done its worst.

And art thou dead? And wou'd'st thou die, my

Wilmot!

For one thou thought'st unjust? Thou soul of
 truth!

What must be done? Which way shall I express
 Unutterable woe? Or how convince

Thy dear departed spirit of the love,

Th' eternal love, and never-failing faith

Of thy much injur'd, lost, despairing *Charlot*?

Y. Wilm. Be still, my flutt'ring heart; hope
 not too soon!

Perhaps I dream, and this is all illusion. [*Aside.*

Char. If, as some teach, the spirit after death,
 Free from the bounds and ties of sordid earth,

Can trace us to our most concealed retreat,

See all we act, and read our very thoughts;

To thee, O *Wilmot!* kneeling I appeal.

If e'er I swerv'd in action, word, or thought,

Or ever wish'd to taste a joy on earth

That center'd not in thee, since last we parted;

D

May

26 FATAL CURIOSITY.

May we ne'er meet again, but thy loud wrongs
So close the ear of mercy to my cries,
That I may never see those bright abodes
Where truth and virtue only have admision,
And thou inhabit'st now !

Y. Wilm. Assist me, heaven !
Preserve my reason, memory, and sense !
O moderate my fierce tumultuous joys,
Or their excess will drive me to distraction.
O *Charlot ! Charlot !* lovely, virtuous maid !
Can thy firm mind, in spite of time and absence,
Remain unshaken, and support its truth ;
And yet thy frailer memory retain
No image, no idea of thy lover ?
Why dost thou gaze so wildly ? Look on me ;
Turn thy dear eyes this way ; observe me well.
Have scorching climates, time, and this strange
habit
So chang'd and so disguised thy faithful *Wilmot*,
That nothing in my voice, my face, or mien,
Remains to tell my *Charlot* I am he ?

[After viewing him some time, she approaches weeping, and gives him her hand ; and then turning towards him, sinks upon his bosom.]

Why dost thou weep ? Why dost thou tremble
thus ?

Why doth thy panting heart and cautious touch
Speak thee but half convinc'd ? Whence are thy
fears ?

Why art thou silent ? Canst thou doubt me still ?

Char. No, *Wilmot !* no ; I'm blind with too
much light :

O'ercome with wonder, and oppress'd with joy.
This vast profusion of extreme delight,
Rising at once, and bursting from despair,
Defies the aid of words, and mocks description.

But

But for one sorrow, one sad scene of anguish,
That checks the swelling torrent of my joys,
I could not bear the transport.

Y. Wilm. Let me know it:
Give me my portion of thy sorrow, *Charlot!*
Let me partake thy grief, or bear it for thee.

Char. Alas! my *Wilmot!* these sad tears are
thine,

They flow for thy misfortunes. I am pierced
With all the agonies of strong compassion,
With all the bitter anguish you must feel,
When you shall hear your parents —

Y. Wilm. Are no more.

Char. You apprehend me wrong.

Y. Wilm. Perhaps I do,
Perhaps you mean to say, the greedy grave
Was satisfy'd with one, and one is left
To bless my longing eyes. But which, my *Char-*
lot?

Char. Afflict yourself no more with groundless
fears:

Your parents both are living. Their distress,
The poverty to which they are reduced,
In spite of my weak aid, was what I mourned:
That poverty in age, to them whose youth
Was crown'd with full prosperity, I fear,
Is worse, much worse, than death.

Y. Wilm. My joy's complete!
My parents living, and possess'd of thee!—
From this blest hour, the happiest of my life,
I'll date my rest. My anxious hopes and fears,
My weary travels, and my dangers past,
Are now rewarded all: Now I rejoice
In my success, and count my riches gain.
For know, my soul's best treasure! I have wealth
Enough to glut ev'n Avarice itself:

28 FATAL CURIOSITY.

No more shall cruel want, or proud contempt,
Oppress the sinking spirits, or insult
The hoary heads of those who gave me being.

Char. 'Tis now, O riches, I conceive your
worth:

You are not base, nor can you be superfluous,
But when misplac'd in base and fordid hands.
Fly, fly, my *Wilmot*! leave thy happy *Charlot*!
Thy filial piety, the sighs and tears
Of thy lamenting parents, call thee hence.

Y. Wilm. I have a friend, the partner of my
voyage,
Who, in the storm last night, was shipwreck'd
with me.

Char. Shipwreck'd last night!—O you im-
mortal powers!
What have you suffer'd! How were you preserv'd!

Y. Wilm. Let that, and all my other strange
escapes
And perilous adventures, be the theme
Of many a happy winter night to come.
My present purpose was t'intreat my angel,
To know this friend, this other better *Wilmot*,
And come with him this evening to my father's:
I'll send him to thee.

Char. I consent with pleasure.

Y. Wilm. Heavens! what a night! How shall
I bear my joy!

My parents, yours, my friend's, all will be mine.
If such the early hopes, the vernal bloom,
The distant prospect of my future bliss,
Then what the ruddy autumn! What the fruit,
The full possession of thy Heavenly charms!

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE

SCENE II.

A Street in Penryn.

Enter Randal.

Rand. Poor! poor! and friendless! whither shall
I wander,
And to what point direct my views and hopes?
A menial servant!—No—What shall I live,
Here in this land of freedom live distinguish'd,
And mark'd the willing slave of some proud sub-
ject!—
To swell his useless train for broken fragments,
The cold remains of his superfluous board?—
I wou'd aspire to something more and better.
Turn thy eyes then to the prolific ocean,
Whose spacious bosom opens to thy view:
There deathless honour, and unenvied wealth,
Have often crown'd the brave adventurer's toils.
This is the native uncontested right,
The fair inheritance of ev'ry *Briton*
That dares put in his claim—My choice is made:
A long farewell to *Cornwall*, and to *England*!
If I return—But stay, what stranger's this,
Who, as he views me, seems to mend his pace?

Enter Young Wilmot.

Y. Wilm. *Randal!*—The dear companion of my
youth!—
Sure lavish fortune means to give me all
I could desire, or ask for this blest day,
And leave me nothing to expect hereafter.
Rand. Your pardon, sir! I know but one on
earth
Cou'd properly salute me by the title

You're

You're pleas'd to give me, and I would not
think

That you are he—That you are *Wilmot*.—

Y. Wilm. Why?

Rand. Because I cou'd not bear the disap-
pointment

—If I shou'd be deceived.

Y. Wilm. I am pleas'd to hear it :
Thy friendly fears better exprefs thy thoughts
Than words could do.

Rand. O! *Wilmot*! O! my master !
Are you return'd?

Y. Wilm. I have not yet embrac'd
My parents—I shall see you at my father's.

Rand. No, I'm discharg'd from thence—O fir!
such ruin—

Y. Wilm. I've heard it all, and hasten to re-
lieve 'em :

Sure heaven hath bless'd me to that very end :
I've wealth enough ; nor shalt thou want a part.

Rand. I have a part already—I am blest
In your success, and share in all your joys.

Y. Wilm. I doubt it not. But tell me, dost
thou think,

My parents not suspecting my return,
That I may visit them, and not be known ?

Rand. 'Tis hard for me to judge. You are
already

Grown so familiar to me, that I wonder
I knew you not at first : yet it may be ;
For you're much alter'd, and they think you dead.

Y. Wilm. This is certain ; *Charlot* beheld me
long,

And heard my loud reproaches, and complaints,
Without remembr'ing she had ever seen me.

My mind at ease grows wanton : I wou'd fain

Refine

Refine on happiness. Why may I not
 Indulge my curiosity, and try
 If it be possible by seeing first
 My parents as a stranger, to improve
 Their pleasure by surprise?

Rand. It may indeed
 Inhance your own, to see from what despair
 Your timely coming, and unhop'd success
 Have given you power to raise them.

Y. Wilm. I remember,
 E'er since we learn'd together, you excelled
 In writing fairly, and could imitate
 Whatever hand you saw with great exactness.
 I therefore beg you'll write, in *Charlot's* name
 And character, a letter to my father;
 And recommend me, as a friend of hers,
 To his acquaintance.

Rand. Sir, if you desire it—
 And yet——

Y. Wilm. Nay, no objections! 'Twill save
 time,
 Most precious with me now. For the deception,
 If doing what my *Charlot* will approve,
 'Cause done for me and with a good intent,
 Deserves the name, I'll answer it myself.
 If this succeeds, I purpose to defer
 Discov'ring who I am 'till *Charlot* comes,
 And thou, and all who love me. Ev'ry friend
 Who witnesses my happiness to-night,
 Will, by partaking, multiply my joys.

Rand. You grow luxurious in imagination.
 Cou'd I deny you aught, I would not write
 This letter. To say true, I ever thought
 Your boundless curiosity a weakness.

Y. Wilm. What canst thou blame in this?

Rand. Your pardon, Sir!

Perhaps

32 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Perhaps I spoke too freely ;
I'm ready t'obey your orders.

Y. Wilm. I am much thy debtor,
But I shall find a time to quit thy kindness.
O Randal! but imagine to thyself
The floods of transport, the sincere delight
That all my friends will feel, when I disclose
To my astonish'd parents my return,
And then confess, that I have well contriv'd
By giving others joy t'exalt my own.

S C E N E III.

Old Wilmot's House.

Old Wilmot and Agnes.

O. Wilm. Here, take this *Seneca* : this haughty
pedant,
Who governing the master of mankind,
And awing power imperial, prates of—patience;
And praises poverty—possess'd of millions :
—Sell him, and buy us bread. The scantiest
meal
The vilest copy of his book e'er purchas'd,
Will give us more relief in this distress,
Than all his boasted precepts.—Nay, no tears ;
Keep them to move compassion when you beg.

Agn. My heart may break, but never stoop to
that.

O. Wilm. Nor would I live to see it — But
dispatch. *[Exit Agnes.]*
Where must I charge this length of misery,
That gathers force each moment as it rolls,
And must at last o'erwhelm me, but on hope :
Vain, flattering, delusive, groundless hope,
That

That has for years deceiv'd me?—Had I thought
 As I do now, as wise men ever think,
 When first this hell of poverty o'ertook me,
 That power to die implies a right to do it,
 And shou'd be us'd when life becomes a pain,
 What plagues had I prevented!—True, my wife
 Is still a slave to prejudice and fear——
 I would not leave my better part, the dear [*Weeps.*
 Faithful companion of my happier days,
 To bear the weight of age and want alone.
 ——I'll try once more——

Enter Agnes, and after her young Wilmot.

O. Wilm. Return'd, my life! so soon!—

Agn. The unexpected coming of this stranger
 Prevents my going yet.

Y. Wilm. You're, I presume,
 The gentleman to whom this is directed. [*Gives a*
 What wild neglect, the token of despair, *letter.*
 What indigence, what misery appears
 In this once happy house! What discontent,
 What anguish and confusion fill the faces
 Of its dejected owners!

O. Wilm. [*Having read the letter.*]

——Sir, such welcome
 As this poor house affords, you may command.
 Our ever friendly neighbour—Once we hop'd
 T'have call'd fair *Charlot* by a dearer name——
 But we have done with hope—I pray excuse
 This incoherence——We had once a son. [*Weeps.*

Agn. That you are come from that dear vir-
 tuous maid,
 Revives in us the mem'ry of a loss,
 Which tho' long since, we have not learn'd to
 bear.

E

Y. Wilm.

Y. Wilm. The joy to see them, and the bitter
 pain
 It is to see them thus, touches my soul
 With tenderness and grief, that will overflow.
 —They know me not, and yet I shall, I fear,
 Defeat my purpose, and betray myself. [*Aside.*

O. Wilm. The lady calls you here her valu'd
 friend;
 Enough, tho' nothing more shou'd be imply'd,
 To recommend you to our best esteem,
 —A worthless acquisition! May she find
 Some means that better may express her kindness!
 But she, perhaps, hath purpos'd to enrich
 You with herself, and end her fruitless sorrow
 For one whom death alone can justify
 For leaving her so long. If it be so,
 May you repair his loss, and be to *Charlot*
 A second, happier *Wilmot*! Partial nature,
 Who only favours youth; as feeble age
 Were not her offspring or below her care;
 Has seal'd our doom: No second hope shall spring
 To dry our tears, and dissipate despair.

Agn. The last and most abandon'd of our kind,
 By heaven and earth neglected or despis'd,
 The loathsome grave, that robb'd us of our son
 And all our joys in him, must be our refuge.

Y. Wilm. Let ghosts unpardon'd, or devoted
 fiends,
 Fear without hope, and wail in such sad strains;
 But grace defend the living from despair!
 The darkest hours precede the rising sun,
 And mercy may appear, when least expected.

O. Wilm. This I have heard a thousand times
 repeated,
 And have, believing, been as oft deceiv'd.

Y. Wilm.

Y. Wilm. Behold in me an instance of its truth.
 At sea twice shipwreck'd, and as oft the prey
 Of lawless pirates; by the *Arabs* thrice
 Surpriz'd, and robb'd on shore; and once reduc'd
 To worse than these, the sum of all distress
 That the most wretched feel on this side hell,
 Ev'n slavery itself: Yet here I stand,
 Except one trouble that will quickly end,
 The happiest of mankind.

O. Wilm. A rare example
 Of fortune's changes; apter to surprise
 Or entertain, than comfort or instruct.
 If you would reason from events, be just,
 And count, when you escaped, how many perish'd;
 And draw your inf'rence thence.

Agn. Alas! who knows,
 But we were rendered childless by some storm,
 In which you, tho' preserv'd, might bear a part?

Y. Wilm. How has my curiosity betray'd me
 Into superfluous pain! I faint with fondness;
 And shall, if I stay longer, rush upon 'em,
 Proclaim myself their son, kiss and embrace 'em
 Till, with the excess of pleasure and surprize,
 Their souls transported, their frail mansions quit,
 And leave 'em breathless in my longing arms.
 By circumstances then and slow degrees,
 They must be let into a happiness
 Too great for them to bear at once, and live:
 That *Charlot* will perform. I need not feign
 To ask an hour for rest. (*Aside.*) Sir, I intreat
 The favour to retire, where for a while
 I may repose myself. You will excuse
 This freedom, and the trouble that I give you:
 'Tis long since I have slept, and nature calls.

O. Wilmot I pray no more: Believe we're only
 troubled,
 That you shou'd think any excuse were needful.

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Y. Wilmot. The weight of this to me is some
incumbrance,
[*Taks a casket out of his bosom, and gives it to his
mother.*]

And its contents of value: If you please
To take the charge of it 'till I awake,
I shall not rest the worse. If I should sleep
'Till I am ask'd for, as perhaps I may,
I beg that you wou'd wake me.

Agn. Doubt it not:
Distracted as I am with various woes,
I shall remember that. [*Exit, with Old Wilmot.*]

Y. Wilm. Merciless grief!
What ravage has it made! how has it chang'd
Her lovely form and mind! I feel her anguish,
And dread I know not what from her despair.
My father too——O grant 'em patience, Heaven!
A little longer, a few short hours more,
And all their cares, and mine, shall end for ever.
[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III. SCENE I.

[*The Scene continues.*]

Enter Agnes alone, with the Casket in her Hand.

WHO shou'd this stranger be?—And then
this casket—
He says it is of value, and yet trusts it,
As if a trifle, to a stranger's hand—
His confidence amazes me—Perhaps
It is not what he says—I'm strongly tempted
To open it, and see—No, let it rest!
Why should I pry into the cares of others,
Who have so many sorrows of my own?
With how much ease the spring gives way—Sur-
prizing!—

My

My eyes are dazzled, and my ravish'd heart
Leaps at the glorious sight. How bright's the
lustre,

And how immense the worth of these fair jewels!—
Ay, such a treasure wou'd expel for ever
Base poverty, and all its abject train;
Famine; the cold neglect of friends; the scorn,
Or more provoking pity of the world.

Plenty, content, and power might take their turn,
And lofty pride bare its aspiring head
At our approach, and once more bend before us.
—A pleasing dream!—'Tis past; and now I
wake.

For sure it was a happiness to think,
Tho' but a moment, such a treasure mine.
Nay, it was more than thought—I saw and
touch'd

The bright temptation, and I see it yet—
'Tis here—'tis mine—I have it in possession—
—Must I resign it? Must I give it back?
Am I in love with misery and want?—
To rob myself, and court so vast a loss?—
—Retain it then—But how?—There is a way—
Why sinks my heart? Why does my blood run
cold?

Why am I thrill'd with horror?—'Tis not choice,
But dire necessity suggests the thought.

Enter Old Wilmot.

O. Wilm. The mind contented, with how lit-
tle pains

The wand'ring senses yield to soft repose!
He's fallen asleep already—Happy man!
What dost thou think, my *Agnes*, of our guest?
He seems to me a youth of great humanity:
Just ere he clos'd his eyes, that swam in tears,

He

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He wrung my hand, and press'd it to his lips;
And with a look, that pierc'd me to the soul,
Begg'd me to comfort thee: And—Dost thou
hear me?—

What art thou gazing on?—Fie, 'tis not
well.

This casket was deliver'd to you clos'd:
Why have you open'd it? Shou'd this be known,
How mean must we appear!

Agn. And who shall know it?

O. Wilm. There is a kind of pride, a decent
dignity

Due to ourselves; which, spite of our misfor-
tunes,

May be maintain'd, and cherish'd to the last.
To live without reproach, and without leave
To quit the world, shews sovereign contempt,
And noble scorn of its relentless malice.

Agn.—Shews sovereign madness, and a scorn
of sense.

Pursue no farther this detested theme:
I will not die; I will not leave the world
For all that you can urge, until compell'd.

O. Wilm. To chace a shadow when the setting
sun

Is darting his last rays, were just as wise
As your anxiety for fleeting life,
Now the last means for its support are failing:
Were famine not as mortal as the sword,
Your warmth might be excused—But take thy
choice;

Die how you will, you shall not die alone.

Agn. Nor live, I hope.

O. Wilm. There is no fear of that.

Agn. Then, we'll live both.

O. Wilm. Strange folly! Where the means?

Agn.

Agn. There—those jewels!

O. Wilm. Ha!—Take heed!

Perhaps thou dost but try me—yet take heed!
There's nought so monstrous but the mind of man
In some conditions may be brought t'approve:
Theft, sacrilege, treason, and parricide,
When flatt'ring opportunity entic'd,
And desperation drove, have been committed
By those who once wou'd start to hear them nam'd.

Agn. And add to these detested suicide,
Which, by a crime much less, we may avoid.

O. Wilm. How cou'd'st thou form a thought
so very damning?

So advantageous, so secure, and easy;
And yet so cruel, and so full of horror!

Agn. 'Tis less impiety, less against nature,
To take another's life, than end our own.

O. Wilm. No matter which, the less or greater
crime:

Howe'er we may deceive ourselves or others,
We act from inclination, not by rule,
Or none could act amiss: and that all err,
None but the conscious hypocrite denies.
—O! what is man, his excellence and strength,
When in an hour of trial and desertion,
Reason, his noblest power, may be suborn'd
To plead the cause of vile assassination!

Agn. You're too severe: Reason may justly
plead

For our own preservation.

O. Wilm. Rest contented:

Whate'er resistance I may seem to make,
I am betray'd within: My will's seduc'd,
And my whole soul infected. The desire
Of life returns, and brings with it a train
Of appetites that rage to be supply'd.

Whoever

40 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Whoever stands to parley with temptation,
Parlies to be o'ercome.

Agn. Then nought remains,
But the swift execution of a deed
That is not to be thought on, or delay'd—

O. Wilm. Gen'rous, unhappy man! O! what
 cou'd move thee
To put thy life and fortune in the hands
Of wretches mad with anguish!

Agn. By what means
Shall we effect his death?

O. Wilm. Why, what a fiend!—
How cruel, how remorseless and impatient
Have pride and poverty made thee!

Agn. Barbarous man!
Whose wasteful riots ruin'd our estate,
And drove our son, ere the first dawn had spread
His rosy cheeks, spite of my sad presages,
Earnest intreaties, agonies, and tears,
To seek his bread 'mongst strangers, and to perish
In some remote, inhospitable land—
The loveliest youth, in person and in mind,
That ever crown'd a groaning mother's pains!
Where was thy pity, where thy patience then?
Thou cruel husband! thou unnat'ral father!
Thou most remorseless, most ungrateful man!
To waste my fortune, rob me of my son,
To drive me to despair, and then reproach me
For being what thou'lt made me!

O. Wilm. Dry thy tears:
I ought not to reproach thee. I confess
That thou hast suffer'd much: So have we both.
But chide no more: I'm wrought up to thy pur-
 pose.

The poor, ill-fated, unsuspecting victim,
Ere he reclin'd him on the fatal couch,

From

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From which he's ne'er to rise, took off the sash,
And costly dagger that thou saw'st him wear,
And thus, unthinking, furnish'd us with arms
Against himself. Steal to the door,
And bring me word, if he be still asleep.

[*Ex. Agnes.*]

Old Wilmot *alone.*

Or I'm deceiv'd, or he pronounc'd himself
The happiest of mankind. Deluded wretch!
Thy thoughts are perishing, thy youthful joys,
Touch'd by the icy hand of grisly death,
Are with'ring in their bloom——But thought
extinguish'd,
He'll never know the loss,
Nor feel the bitter pangs of disappointment—
Then I was wrong in counting him a wretch:
To die well pleas'd
Is all the happiest of mankind can hope for.
To be a wretch is to survive the loss
Of every joy, and even hope itself,
As I have done—Why do I mourn him then?
For, by the anguish of my tortur'd soul,
He's to be envy'd, if compar'd with me.

Enter Agnes with Young Wilmot's Dagger.

Agn. The stranger sleeps at present; but so
restless

His slumbers seem, they can't continue long:
Here, I've secur'd his dagger.

O. Wilm. O *Agnes!* *Agnes!* if there be a hell,
'Tis just we should expect it. [*Goes to take the
dagger, but lets it fall.*]

Agn. Shake off this panic, and be more yourself.

F

O.

42 FATAL CURIOSITY.

O. Wilm. What's to be done? On what had
we determin'd?

Agn. You're quite dismay'd.

[Takes up the dagger.]

O. Wilm. Give me the fatal steel.

'Tis but a single murder,
Necessity, impatience, and despair,
The three wide mouths of that true Cerberus,
Grim poverty, demand: they shall be stopp'd.
Ambition, persecution, and revenge
Devour their millions daily: And shall I—
But follow me, and see how little cause
You had to think there was the least remain
Of manhood, pity, mercy, or remorse
Left in this savage breast. *[Going the wrong way.]*

Agn. Where do you go?

The street is that way.

O. Wilm. True! I had forgot.

Agn. Quite, quite confounded!

O. Wilm. Well, I recover.—I shall find the
way. *[Exit.]*

Agn. O softly! softly! The least noise undoes
us.

What are we doing? Misery and want,
Are lighter ills than this! I cannot bear it!—
Stop, hold thy hand!—Inconstant, wretched
woman!

What! doth my heart recoil?—O *Wilmot!*
Wilmot!

What pow'r shall I invoke to aid thee, *Wilmot?*
[Exit.]

Enter Charlot, Eustace, and Randal.

Char. What strange neglect! The doors are
all unbarr'd,
And not a living creature to be seen!

Enter Old Wilmot and Agnes.

Char. Sir, we are come to give and to receive
A thousand greetings—Ha! what can this mean!
Why do you look with such amazement on us?
Are these your transports for your son's return?
Where is my *Wilmot*?—Has he not been here?
Wou'd he defer your happiness so long,
Or cou'd a habit so disguise your son,
That you refus'd to own him?

Agn. Heard you that?—
What prodigy of horror is disclosing,
To render murder venial!

O. Wilm. Prithee, peace:
The miserable damn'd suspend their howling,
And the swift orbs are fixt in deep attention.

Rand. What mean these dreadful words, and
frantic air!
That is the dagger my young master wore.

Eust. My mind misgives me. Do not stand
to gaze
On these dumb phantoms of despair and horror!
Let us search further; *Randal*, shew the way.
[*Exeunt.*

Manent Old Wilmot and Agnes.

Agn. Let life forsake the earth, and light the
sun,
And death and darkness bury in oblivion
Mankind and all their deeds, that no posterity
May ever rise to hear our horrid tale,
Or view the grave of such detested parricides!

O. Wilm. Curses and deprecations are in vain:
The sun will shine, and all things have their
course,
When we, the curse and burden of the earth,
Shall be absorb'd, and mingled with its dust.

44 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Our guilt and desolation must be told,
From age to age, to teach desponding mortals,
How far beyond the reach of human thought
Heaven, when incens'd, can punish—Die thou
first. [Stabs Agnes.

I durst not trust thy weakness.

Agn. Ever kind,
But most in this!

O. Wlm. I will not long survive thee.

Agn. Do not accuse thy erring mother, *Wilmot!*
With too much rigour when we meet above.
To give thee life for life, and blood for blood,
Is not enough. Had I ten thousand lives,
I'd give them all to speak my penitence
Deep, and sincere, and equal to my crime. [Dies.

Enter Randal, Eustace.

Eust. O Wilmot! Wilmot!
Are these the fruits of all thy anxious cares
For thy ungrateful parents?—Cruel fiends!
O. Wilm. What whining fool art thou, who
would'st usurp
My sovereign right of grief?—Was he thy son!—
Say! Canst thou shew thy hands reeking with
blood,
That flow'd, thro' purer channels, from thy
loins?

Compute the sands that bound the spacious ocean,
And swell their number with a single grain;
Increase the noise of thunder with thy voice;
Or, when the raging wind lays nature waste,
Assist the tempest with thy feeble breath;
Add water to the sea, and fire to *Etna*;
But name not thy faint sorrow, with the anguish
Of a curst wretch, who only hopes from this

[Stabbing himself.
To change the scene, but not relieve his pain.

Rand.

Rand. A dreadful instance of the last remorse!
May all your woes end here!

O. Wilm. O would they end
A thousand ages hence, I then should suffer
Much less than I deserve. Yet let me say,
You'll do but justice to inform the world,
This horrid deed, that punishes itself,
Was not intended, thinking him our son;
For that we knew not, 'till it was too late.
Proud and impatient under our afflictions,
While heaven was labouring to make us happy,
We brought this dreadful ruin on ourselves.
Mankind may learn——but——oh!—— [*Dies*]

Rand. Heaven grant they may!
And may thy penitence atone thy crime!
'Tend well the hapless *Charlot*, and bear hence
These bleeding victims of despair and pride;
Toll the death bell! and follow to the grave
The wretched Parents and ill-fated Son.

And a beautiful landscape of the little prince's world.
The little prince was very happy.
He had a very good friend.
A fox, who was very wise.
The fox told him many things.
And the little prince learned a lot.
He learned that the world is very big.
And that there are many people out there.
Who are looking for happiness.
And the little prince found it.
In the heart of a flower.
A flower that was very beautiful.
And the little prince loved it.
He loved it very much.
And he took care of it.
He watered it every day.
And he talked to it.
He told it all his secrets.
And the flower was very happy.
It was the little prince's flower.
His flower.

P O S T S C R I P T.

THOUGH *the Fatal Curiosity* of LILLO has received the applause of many sound critics, and been accounted worthy of the Græcian stage, and (what is, perhaps, still higher merit) worthy of Skakespeare! yet the long exclusion of this drama from the theatre had in some measure obscured the fame of a tragedy, whose uncommon excellence challenged more celebrity. The late Mr. Harris, of Salisbury, has endeavoured, in his PHILOLOGICAL INQUIRIES, to display the beauties, *the terrible graces*, of the piece, and to do justice to the memory of LILLO. His comment is in general just; yet he seems to have given a sketch of *the Fable* from an imperfect recollection of the circumstances, without the book before him. He appears to have conceived that the tragedy derived its title from the *curiosity* of Agnes to know the contents of the casket: but that LILLO meant to mark by the title the FATAL CURIOSITY of Young Wilmot, is evident from the whole scene between him and Randal, wherein he arranges the plan of his intended interview with his parents; which arrangement Mr. Harris erroneously attributes to his conference with Charlot. The principle of CURIOSITY is openly avowed and warmly sustained by Young Wilmot, and humbly reprehended by Randal.

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The comment of Mr. Harris is, however, on the whole, most judicious and liberal. It concludes with a note in these words :

“ If any one read this tragedy, the author of these *Inquiries* has a request or two to make, for which he hopes a candid reader will forgive him—One is, not to cavil at minute inaccuracies, but look to the superior merit of *the whole taken together*—Another is, totally to expunge those wretched *rhimes*, which conclude many of the scenes; and which, 'tis probable, are not from LILLO, but from some other hand, willing to conform to an absurd fashion, *then* practised, but now laid aside, the fashion (I mean) of a *rhiming conclusion*.”

Philological Inquiries, vol. i. p. 174.

The present Editor thought it his duty to remove, as far as he was able, the blemishes here noticed by Mr. Harris; and he therefore expunged *the rhiming conclusions* of acts and scenes, except in one instance, where he thought the couplet too beautiful to be displaced. Some *minute inaccuracies* of language he also hazarded an attempt to correct; and even in some measure to mitigate the horror of the catastrophe, by the omission of some expressions rather too savage, and by one or two touches of remorse and tenderness. Agnes is most happily drawn after Lady Macbeth; in whose character there is not perhaps a finer trait, than her saying, during the murder of Duncan,

“ Had he not resembled

“ My father as he slept, I had don't !”

The

The story, on which this tragedy is founded is, I believe, at present no where extant, except in a folio volume, printed in the year 1681, and entitled *The Annals of King JAMES and King CHARLES the First. Both of happy memory.* The period included in these Annals is from the Tenth of James, to the Eighteenth of Charles. They are published anonymously, yet are generally known by the name of *Frankland's Annals.* The author places this tragical event in the Annals of the year 1618, and relates it in these words:

“ The miserable condition of sinful man in fundry examples of these present and of former times, should mind us hourly to beg of God preventing grace, lest we fall into temptations of sin and Satan; such have been the calamities of ages past, at present are, and will be to come; histories of *theft, rapine, murther,* and such like.

“ One of wondrous note happened at Perinin in Cornwall, in September, a bloody and unexampled murther, by a father and mother upon their own son, and then upon themselves.

“ He had been blessed with ample possessions, and fruitful issue, unhappy only in a younger son; who taking liberty from his father's bounty, and with a crew of like condition, that were wearied on land, they went roving to sea; and in a small vessel southward, took booty, from all whom they could master, and so increasing force and wealth, ventured on a Turks-man in the Streights; but by mischance their own powder fired themselves; and our gallant, trusting to his skilful swimming,

got ashore upon Rhodes, with the best of his jewels about him, where offering some to sale to a Jew, who knew them to be the governor's of Algier, he was apprehended, and as a pyrate sentenced to the gallies amongst other christians, whose miserable slavery made them all studious of freedom; and with wit and valour took opportunity and means to murder some officers, got aboard of an English ship, and came safe to London, where his Majesty and some skill made him servant to a chyrurgion, and sudden preferment to the East Indies; there by this means he got mony, with which returning back, he designed himself for his native county Cornwall; and in a small ship from London, sailing to the West, was cast away upon the coast; but his excellent skill in swimming, and former fate to boot, brought him safe to shore; where since his fifteen years absence, his father's former fortunes much decayed, now retired him not far off to a country habitation, in debt and danger.

“ His sister, he finds married to a mercer, a meaner match than her birth promised; to her at first appears a poor stranger, but in private reveals himself, and withal what jewels and gold he had concealed in a bow-case about him; and concluded that the next day he intended to appear to his parents, and to keep his disguise till she and her husband should meet, and make their common joy compleat.

“ Being come to his parents, his humble behaviour, suitable to his suit of cloaths, melted the old couple to so much compassion, as to give him covering from the cold season under
6 their

their outward roof; and by degrees his travelling tales told with passion to the aged people, made him their guest, so long by the kitchen fire, that the husband took leave and went to bed, and soon after his true stories working compassion in the weaker vessel, she wept, and so did he; but compassionate of her tears, he comforted her with a piece of gold, which gave assurance that he deserved a lodging, to which she brought him, and being in bed shewed her his girdled wealth, which he said was sufficient to relieve her husband's wants, to spare for himself; and being very weary, fell fast asleep.

“ The wife tempted with the golden bait of what she had, and eager of enjoying all, awaked her husband with this news, and her contrivance what to do; and though with horrid apprehension he oft refused, yet her puling fondness (Eve's enchantments) moved him to consent, and rise to be master of all; and both of them to murder the man, which instantly they did, covering the corps under the cloaths till opportunity to convey it out of the way.

“ The early morning hastens the sister to her father's house, where she with signs of joy, enquires for a saylor that should lodge there the last night; the parents slightly denied to have seen any such, until she told them that it was her brother, her lost brother, by that assured scar upon his arm cut with a sword in his youth, she knew him; and were all resolved this morning to meet there and be merry.

“ The father hastily runs up, finds the mark, and with horrid regret of this monstrous murder of his own son, with the same knife cut his own throat,

“ The

“The wife went up to consult with him, where in a most strange manner beholding them both in blood, wild and aghast, with the instrument at hand, readily rips up her own belly till the guts tumbled out.

“The daughter, doubting the delay of their absence, searches for them all, whom she found out too soon, with the sad sight of this scene; and being overcome with horror and amaze of this deluge of destruction, she sank down and died, the fatal end of that family.

“The truth of which was frequently known, and flew to court in this guise; but the imprinted relation conceals their names, in favour to some neighbour of repute and a-kin to that family.

“The same sense makes me silent also.”

The historical fact, immediately preceding this dreadful narrative, is the fate of Sir Walter Raleigh, which accounts for the author's having, in the original play, introduced the mention of him into the first scene of the tragedy. He has conducted the fable, and accommodated the story to his purpose, with great art. From the reality of the incident, he also calls it a TRUE tragedy. *A TRUE tragedy*, indeed it is, in all senses of the word; and such a tragedy as I thought demanded a revival, and the further notice of the Public.

GEORGE COLMAN.

Soho-Square,
June 28, 1783.

T H E E N D.

